

STREAKY-BREASTED PYGMY CRAKE *SAROTHRURA BOEHMI*:

FIRST DOCUMENTED RECORDS FOR TANZANIA

N.E. Baker, A.J. Beakbane & E.M. Boswell

During the early morning of 15 May 1982 two female Streaky-breasted Pygmy Crakes *Sarothrura boehmi* were caught at Kilima tea factory (8.36S, 35.22E) in the Mufindi District of the Southern Highlands of Tanzania.

The factory, at an altitude of 2005 m, lies close to the escarpment edge of the Uzungwa Mountains. It is situated on a ridge overlooking a major valley where the escarpment runs almost east to west. The lights of the factory are used throughout the year and it has been known for sometime that migrant birds are attracted to them during nights of low cloud. Indeed, a list in MS of local species (Padget-Wilkes 1965) includes 'Boehm's Crake' but without supporting evidence or dates.

Additional lighting and manning of the factory during 1983 and 1984 resulted in the capture of a further six birds with other known Afrotropical migrants which will be documented in a future *Scopus* (Beakbane & Boswell in prep.). Full mensural data of the eight birds are given in Table 1. The male bird caught in May 1983 died and was presented to the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), Tring, where it is registered B.M. Reg. No. 1983-7-1.

TABLE 1

Mensural data (g and mm) of live S. boehmi at Mufindi

Date	Ring No.	Sex	Weight	Wing	Tarsus	Middle Toe	Culmen
15 May 82	A40001	F	-	87	25.8	23.0	11.8 (F)
	A40002	F	-	85	25.6	21.5	11.4 (F)
5 May 83	1983-7-1	M	42	91	24.35	22.63	13.80
2 May 84	A47107	F	35	85	21.89	23.54	13.04
3 May 84	A47108	M	38.5	86	21.92	22.03	13.17
	A47109	M	33.5	91	22.36	22.81	12.95
5 May 84	A47240	M	35	91	25.98	22.94	15.60
5 Jun 84	A47117	F	30.5	86	23.33	23.40	14.16

In 'Culmen' column, (F) indicates that the measurement was to the feathers

Weights were taken with a 'long' 50-g Pesola balance to 0.5 g. Bird A47117 at 30.5 g was extremely thin and had a very prominent sternum. Wing measurements were taken with a steel stopped-end rule to obtain 'maximum length' - the method 3 of Svensson (1975); they are therefore slightly longer than those taken from museum skins. Tarsus measurements were taken from the notch on the back of the intertarsal joint to the upper base of the three forward toes. This method differs significantly from that used by Keith, Benson & Irwin (1970) who used the lower base of the hind toe that forms a spur in this species. Generally our field measurements are approximately 3 mm longer than those of Keith et al. (1970). It is interesting to note that McLachlan & Liversidge (1978) give a 'short' tarsus of 18-19.5 mm yet Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957) give a 'long' one of 21-24 mm. Middle toe measurements were taken from the tip of the claw to the base of the toe as detailed in Keith et al. (1970) and all claws were checked for irregularities. The culmen was measured

to the base of the skull except where stated otherwise in Table 1. A standard vernier caliper measuring to 0.1mm was used in 1982 while a Jocal digital vernier, reading to 0.01mm was used in the other two years.

Sarothrura boehmi closely resembles the Red-chested Pygmy Crake *S. rufa* but differs most conspicuously in the reduced extent of chestnut on the head and neck of the male. The longer wing is of importance in separating this presumably migratory species from more sedentary and closely related ones. The short middle toe is also of importance in separating it from the longer toed *Sarothrura* species that prefer a damper habitat (Keith et al. 1970). The relevant measurements of similar species are given in Table 2. Those for the specimen (1983-7-1) were kindly taken from the skin by Mr P. Colston using museum rather than field techniques. They therefore bear direct comparison with those from Keith et al. (1970); all other measurements are taken from their paper and refer to male birds.

TABLE 2
Comparative measurements (mm) of males
of three species of *Sarothrura*

	Wing	Tarsus	Middle Toe
<i>S. rufa</i>	67 - 80	18 - 23	25 - 32
<i>S. lugens</i>	71 - 82	19 - 22.5	24 - 29
<i>S. boehmi</i>	82 - 88	18.5 - 21.5	19 - 23
1983-7-1	88	20	23

Moult details were taken from three Mufindi birds but no clear picture emerges. They appeared to be in suspended wing moult with a mixture of new and old feathers, all full-grown. However, A47117 appeared to have eight missing flight feathers from the left wing and two missing from the right. A40002 had primaries 1 and 2 new and full-grown, the rest older, more faded and slightly worn. Secondaries 2 and 3 appeared new while others seemed old, some more obviously worn than others. Contour feather wear in females was more obvious than in males. In particular, A40002 had reduced and faded white feather tips which did not therefore form the distinct white bars as illustrated in Keith et al. (1970).

It was noted that all captive birds were exhausted, far more so than other species being caught in similar circumstances. They were extremely thirsty, drinking water at the first opportunity upon release, even taking dew from a lawn for several minutes before running into cover. Later birds were fed on water and dissolved glucose, taking a teaspoonful, which revived them significantly.

It is difficult to prove in which direction these birds were travelling. The species is known to breed in Central Africa, with egg laying in January, February and March and there are Kenya records of birds in breeding condition in May and June (Britton 1980). It therefore seems likely that they were moving northwards after breeding and that at least some (early breeders?) start their moult before departing from their breeding quarters.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank Mr Peter Colston for confirming our identification of the male bird and providing measurements from the skin; Mzee Mohamed Nawa for friendly assistance at the site and Mr Stuart Keith for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

REFERENCES

- BEAKBANE, A.J. & BOSWELL, E.M. (in prep.). Nocturnal Afrotropical migrants from southern Tanzania.
- KEITH, S., BENSON, C.W. & IRWIN, M.P.S. 1970. The genus *Sarothrura* (Aves, Rallidae). *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* 143 (1): 1-84.
- MCLACHLAN, G.R. & LIVERSIDGE, R. 1978. *Roberts birds of South Africa*. Cape Town: Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund.
- PADGET-WILKES, C. 1965. List of species recorded in the Mufindi district. Unpublished MS.
- SVENSSON, L. 1975. *Identification guide to European Passerines*. Stockholm: Naturhistoriska Riksmuseet.
- N.E. Baker, Box 5272, Dar es Salaam, A.J. Beakbane, Box 40, Mufindi and E.M. Boswell, Box 23, Mufindi, Tanzania

(Received 30 July 1984)

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

The undersigned are investigating the question of host selection in two *Clamator* cuckoos in Africa, namely Striped or Levaillant's Cuckoo *C. levaillantii* and Jacobin or Black and White Cuckoo *C. jacobinus* (races *pica* and *serratus*). We are interested to know the whereabouts, if any, of preserved skins of nestlings or fledglings of either species which record their host species. Whereas *C. levaillantii* parasitizes babblers of the genus *Turdoides* probably exclusively, we are anxious to confirm whether or not *C. jacobinus* sometimes parasitizes babblers anywhere in Africa. The best proof of this would be the existence of preserved material. We are conversant with the literature, both old and new, which gives general statements or specific examples of parasitism by *C. jacobinus pica* with *Turdoides* babblers in East and northeastern Africa. As far as we know these records have been based either on blue eggs found in babblers' nests or on sight records of young *Clamator* cuckoos being fed by these hosts. Notwithstanding the fact that *C. jacobinus* commonly parasitizes babblers in India we feel that positive proof is lacking that this cuckoo does so anywhere in Africa.

We would be grateful if curators of collections which contain skins of young *Clamator* cuckoos would re-examine their material and, others who may have field information, would report their findings to the first-named.

M.P.S. Irwin, 3 Whitecainns Avenue, Hillside, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe and J.F.R. Colebrook-Robjent, Musumanene, Box 303, Choma, Zambia